

[Moose City]

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Interview with Alec Berg, Superior, Montana

TOPIC: Moose City; Interesting Early Day Characters

Moose City was discovered, 1868 by Thomas o'Brien and William Shapard. The discovery brought a regular stampede, so that in 1869 there was a population of 600. Nothing remains to show that it was once a lively mining settlement. Part of the old jail still stands; the upper portion has been burned for wood. The forest service has withdrawn from there, and it is just a tourist landmark. When [=?] first came out here, in 1900, the jail was intact, and there was one prospector's cabin left. There are two cemeteries, one to the north of the Moose City site, and one to the south. I was told by old miners that one was for the aristocrats and one for the poorer class. I've often wished that I kept a diary of the stories I've picked up from these old miners; they tell interesting tales.

Davy Graham was one of them. He had claims on China Gulch, from which he took out considerable gold.* He told me he had chased the Chinamen off some of their claims there, but they didn't turn out so well. (I understand that the Chinamen could not make legal locations, and were always unsure of their holdings.)

*Graham used to sing in a quavery voice the song beginning:

"I danced with the girl with the hole in her stocking;

We danced till our heels took to rocking,

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All by the light of the moon.”

The Chinese left Moose City in 1873. When the first discovery was once on Cedar Creek, they rushed to the now mining grounds, leaving behind them their tools and belongings. There must have been at least a hundred of them in [md]/? 2 China Gulch and Lake Greek, which flows into Fish Creek, a tributary of the north fork of the Clearwater River.

Graham's nickname was “Me-onion.” He used to say, “I thought you was a good onion, but you're nothing but a scallion.”

He had a cronie, John Slowey, who owned a ranch at Ashmore. Both were Irish Catholics. They were in superior one St. Patrick's Day celebrating the occasion, Slowey in Bill Bonnet's saloon, next to that is now the Ordean Hotel, and Graham across the street in Joe Charette's saloon. While Slowey was drinking, up, some practical joker pinned a yellow ribbon on Slowey's coat.

After the two woke up, they met out in the middle of the street. Graham saw the yellow ribbon and began to fume and curse. “Ahrr, you Orangeman,” he yelled, “I'm goin' to whip you now.”

But Slowey whipped Graham. Then he took off his coat and dragged it up and down the street, daring anybody to step on it.

Slowey had a balky horse, which he used to drive to Superior over the old hill road from Slowey Gulch. This horse used to stop short, just when Slowey was most anxious to get going. But when his master was drunk, the old horse used to look after him, taking him home without any guiding. One day when Slowey was going home in that way, a wheel came off the buggy, and it rolled into the Missoula River, killing him.

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Russian Bill (Micheal Forrest) was a Russian Finn. He was a short, "soggy" sort of fellow, rough and hard looking. He had a claim, on windfall Creek, a tributary of Trout Greek, above what they called the Holt ground. He died there. It seems to me that ha was caught in a cave-in; however, I'm not sure of that. He was buried on Trout Creek, in what they call the drain, put in by A. P. Johnston. They used to pump water out of the drain about a mile and a half from its beginning. The Holt's (John W. and Tom) got quite a lot of gold out of Windfall.

Tom Keenan worked at the drain, digging it 1100 feet underground. He worked 11 years for Johnston.

Hank (Henry) Curran was about two years older than Graham. He prospected in the hills quite a bit. He was shot by Frank Green with a 30.30 rifle, but was not killed.

N. E. Moderie had a livery barn in Superior when I came here, and carried mail from Iron Mountain to Superior and Carter (Keystone). Wilford Connell ran the stable after Moderie.

The Superior school used to be on the west rise of, and to the north of, the street. When the school was moved, William Beardsley got the building. Mrs. Will LaCombe (now Mrs. Irene Bundrick) inherited it from Beardsley, her uncle. Will LaCombe wanted to tear it down, but the Missoula County Commissioners wouldn't let him. So he built over the old log cabin.

"Fatty" (Joseph; William's brother) LaCombe's cabin was 4 just above the Red Hen Hall. There were twelve bachelors living there at one time; they called themselves the "Dirty Dozen," and the cabin "Mount Royal." They made a compact that the first of their number to marry should fall heir to it. So it went to Will LaCombe, when he married Rene Pelkey. He was quite young then and something of a clown.

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In 1906, there was a Fourth of July rodeo on Iron Mountain flat, on what was then the Wilkinson ranch. On the third, 11 inches of snow fell, with more on the Fourth. So the broncho riders weren't afraid of being bucked off; they had a soft cushion to fall onto.

The Anador pavilion was built in 1907, next the Missoula River and across from Johnston's ranch. It was used for dances and picnics, and lit by Japanese lanterns and gas torches. Nothing remains of it now.

Many interesting anecdotes center around the old Thomas Hotel (the Ordoan). At one time a person suicided in room /? 13, and everybody was superstitious about that room, refusing to sleep there. Louis Lozeau got drunk, and some of the bunch lounging about the hotel carried him into Number 13. Frank Hayes, who was working there then, fixed up a dummy, filling it with straw and topping it with a felt hat. He strung it on a wire and suspended it over the transom.

They had quite a time wading Lozeau, and finally threw some water on him from the transom. That did the trick.

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Lozeau was superstitious. When he looked up and saw that dummy swinging there, he sprang out of bed, cleared the door, and took the stairs almost at one leap. He didn't stop until he got to Camp Fort. That was a logging camp run by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company about 1901 or so. John Pearson's ranch is there now. Lozeau never again got drunk in the Thomas Hotel.

Dolphe Lozeau was Superior's official fiddler. He played fairly well for the first part of the dance, sitting there with a cigarette hanging out of one corner of his mouth. But as the night wore on, he got a few drinks too many and kept to one tune. I can't remember what that favorite of his was.

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Andy McIntyre was another superstitious one. He had been fishing just before he put up at the Thomas, and had stuck a fish hook in his vest pocket. It was fastened to the line, in his pants pocket. He went to bed with all his clothes save the pants. When he got up, the hood pulled the line, and the pants followed McIntyre about. He almost killed himself running away, dashing across the Iron Mountain trail to Frank Gareau's saloon, with his trousers pursuing him.

Another time, McIntyre was coming afoot down Trout Creek. West Wilkinson had left a couple of his pack burros at the drain pump. They were loose, and when McIntyre McIntyre started towards Superior, they trailed after him, just far enough behind so that all he could see was their ears flapping. He ran, then slackened. The burros did the same. They kept that up 15 miles from the pump to town. Andy was sick for a long time afterwards.

"Doc" Bowers was the only doctor here than. He used dope, and it finally got him. His wife, "Mom" Bowers we called her, did too. (Annie, a prostitute.) She died in a sanitarium in Warm Springs. She used snow mainly, but she'd take anything. One day I'd been to Carter (Keystone) with the mail. She hailed me from her doorway: "Go down to Mac's (William McBride) store and tell him I want a bottle of laudanum."

So I got an ounce bottle of it and handed it to her. She uncorked it with shaking, impatient hands, and downed the, whole bottleful before I could stop her. I was scared, for I had no business getting it for her. I ran down, to Mac's and told him about it.

He just drawled: "That's all right. Bring her another bottle. She'll be coming down the street pretty soon, with her hat hanging on three hairs. Sure enough, she did. A bottle of whiskey was nothing to her.

She had a good education, and when sober was intelligent and interesting. She was cured at Warm Springs, and became associate matron before she died there.

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Two of the old miners were Tom and Krist (Christian S.) Lapp. Krist was Tom's father, though he looked the younger of the two. They were big eaters. One day when they went 7 to the Cedars, where the ranger station is now, they killed an elk at a salt lick. It was about nine miles to their cabin on Bostonian Creek. Tom asked, "Well, what'll we do with him?"

"We'll get a little flour," Krist answered, "and move down to him. We'll eat up that fellow in no time."

Krist was called the "Clearwater Ghost." He had a long, full beard and hair to his shoulders.

Angus Smith was one of the real early settlers. He drank heavily, and used to tell stories on himself. One time I was packing for Mrs. Mary Dill. I got out at four o'clock to gather up the horses for an early start into the hills. I saw some object lying on the Amador flat, and rode over to discover what it was Angus. He called:

"Come help me, cut; my hair is froze in the mud and ice." I had to cut his hair short before he could get up.

Another time he'd stolen a rooster to take to a feed at "Mount Royal." On the way, he had a few drinks and went to sleep, still hanging onto the rooster. It crowed and woke him up. That time, his feet were frozen to the ground.

In his time, Smith was much in demand as a camp cook. He could handle 50 or 60 men the best of any cook I've seen, though he never moved fast. Though he was rough looking (he was hunch-backed and had one drooping eye), he was clean about his cooking, and always wore white shirts and white caps and aprons when he was handling a crew.

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Alfred Lozeau's ranch east of Superior used to be an hilarious place. They had a saloon there and a place to dance.

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Venison used to be sold over the block here, just like beef. Mrs. Dan (Diudonne) Lajeunesse ran the Thomas Hotel for a time; she had venison on the bill of fare. I often sold it to the hotel. I suppose there were game restrictions then, but none paid any attention to them; deer were plentiful. Nobody seemed to care much about bear meat except Frank Gareau. I used to bring some to him occasionally. (Bear meat was sometimes served to customers at the hotel, in the guise of pork, just for amusement's sake.)

In the early days, many of the miners were French Canadians. I remember watching Norman Ouilette and Joe Charette talking one day, using their hands freely, as Frenchman must. Finally, Ouilette said, "Let's talk English awhile. My hands are getting cold."

I knew Bill Beach slightly. He was a sort of lone wolf insofar as the common fry of miners were concerned, being more after the monied class.